

Strategic Agricultural Initiative [Regional]
EPA Region 4

Geographic location or area of activity: Region 4 States – Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, South Carolina, and North Carolina

Description of activity: The Region 4 Strategic Agricultural Initiative (SAI) is a subset of a national initiative managed by the Office of Pesticide Programs, Bio-pesticides and Pollution Prevention Division. The SAI has been active since 1998, and was initiated in response to the passage of the Food Quality Protection Act. Region 4 was the first of four pilot programs that ultimately resulted in ten programs within each EPA Region. The focus of the SAI program is to work collaboratively with agricultural stakeholders to foster transition from high-risk pesticides to safer pest management practices. This goal is achieved through a variety of partnership activities and grants. Each Region has a unique approach to transition necessitated by Regional differences in history, climate, topography, crops grown and economic conditions.

In Region 4 the number of collaborations increases each year resulting in savings to the Agency. By working with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other stakeholders, we have better managed scarce resources across the agencies. For example, the SAI National Team is currently working with USDA to develop a national database for integrated pest management projects that will benefit both EPA and USDA. In 2007, collaborative activities undertaken by Region 4 staff resulted in no-cost facilitation at a public meeting provided by the University of Florida and a no-cost space usage of facility meeting space provided by Fort Valley State University to support a Public Stakeholders Meeting and an EPA Listening Tour. Both activities support the Agency's goals and ability to make sound science decisions inclusive of public input and participation. Additionally, many of the grants funded since 1998 have resulted in additional resources from various entities, including USDA, to the SAI grant recipients. The SAI has enhanced the Agencies' ability to work with the agriculture sector and foster new and innovative approaches to collaboration. The SAI program often works across Agency programs, addressing pesticide, water, air and waste issues. The SAI Team members sit on a number of Advisory Councils and Boards and often assist other agencies in reviewing proposals for possible funding. Measuring success in terms of direct benefit to the environment, since often, success is outside the duration of projects funded and may involve multiple agencies.

Interagency partners: U.S. Department of Agriculture's Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program; North Carolina Natural Resources and Conservation Service; U.S. Department of Agriculture's Southern Integrated Pest Management Center.

Local partners: Georgia Organics; Center for Agricultural Partnerships; Delta F.A.R.M; Florida Plant Medicine Program; the Land Grant Universities.